

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Jabbar Jomo Straws,	) C/A No. 4:06-3414-HFF-TER
	)
Plaintiff,	)
	)
vs.	)
	) Report and Recommendation
Judge Jeffcoat, Lexington County Magistrate Court,	)
	)
Defendant.	)
	)

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The plaintiff, Jabbar Straws (Plaintiff), proceeding *pro se*, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.<sup>1</sup> Plaintiff is an inmate at Lee County Correctional Institution, a facility of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), and files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915. The Complaint names as defendant a Judge Jeffcoat (Defendant) of the Lexington County Magistrate Court, and claims Defendant set excessive bail, causing Plaintiff mental pain and suffering.

This Complaint should be dismissed, because the sole Defendant is immune from suit.

**Pro Se and In Forma Pauperis Review**

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915; 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; and the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents:

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1)(B), and Local Rule 73.02(B)(2)(d), D.S.C., the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

*Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); and *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1983).

The Complaint herein has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted” or is “frivolous or malicious.” § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), (ii). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. at 31 (1992). Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. at 319; *Allison v. Kyle*, 66 F.3d 71 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995).

Plaintiff is a *pro se* litigant, and thus his pleadings are accorded liberal construction. *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 5 (1980); *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. at 519; *Loe v. Armistead*, 582 F. 2d 1291 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1978); *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F. 2d 1147 (4<sup>th</sup> 1978). *Pro se* pleadings are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. at 5. Even under this less stringent standard, however, the *pro se* Complaint is still subject to summary dismissal. The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F. 2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990).

### Discussion

The sole Defendant is immune from suit, and the suit should thus be dismissed at this stage in the proceedings. See *Sieger v. Gilley*, 500 U.S. 226 (1991) (immunity presents a threshold question which should be resolved before discovery is even allowed); and *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985) (absolute immunity "is an immunity from suit rather than a mere defense to liability").

Because Defendant is immune and Plaintiff seeks damages, this case is encompassed by 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(2). The Complaint alleges damages resulting from the judge's decision, which is clearly a judicial act triggering judicial immunity. Magistrate's courts are part of South Carolina's unified judicial system. See Article V, § 1 of the Constitution of the State of South Carolina ("The judicial power shall be vested in a unified judicial system, which shall include a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeals, a Circuit Court, and such other courts of uniform jurisdiction as may be provided for by general law."); *City of Pickens v. Schmitz*, 297 S.C. 253, 376 S.E.2d 271, 272 (SC 1989); and *Cort Industries Corp. v. Swirl, Inc.*, 264 S.C. 142, 213 S.E.2d 445, 446 (SC 1975).

As South Carolina Magistrate Judges are part of the State of South Carolina's unified judicial system, they have absolute judicial immunity. See *Macon v. Cox*, No. 04-01311, slip-op at 1, 2005 WL 4572216 (D.S.C. June 13, 2005). Hence, Judge Jeffcoat is entitled to summary dismissal in the above-captioned case because he has absolute judicial immunity with respect to his judicial acts in Plaintiff's criminal case. See *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 116 L.Ed.2d 9, 112 S.Ct. 286 (1991); *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 351-364 (1978); *Pressly v. Gregory*, 831 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987) (a suit by

South Carolina inmate against two Virginia magistrates); and *Chu v. Griffith*, 771 F.2d 79, 81 (4th Cir. 1985) ("[i]t has long been settled that a judge is absolutely immune from a claim for damages arising out of his judicial actions").

Plaintiff has already filed three federal cases this year. In a previous case (C/A No. 4:06-2475-HFF-TER), Plaintiff was told that a judge is immune from suit. Yet, he has filed this case with the same deficiency. Because this case is frivolous, names an immune Defendant, and fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, it is recommended that this case be deemed a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). This will be Plaintiff's second such strike.

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#### **Recommendation**

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. See *Denton v. Hernandez; Neitzke v. Williams; Haines v. Kerner; Todd v. Baskerville* at 74; 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii); and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

Additionally, for the foregoing reasons, it is also recommended that the above-captioned case be deemed a "strike" for purposes of the "three strikes" rule of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

Respectfully submitted,

December 12 ,2006  
Florence, SC

s/Thomas E. Rogers, III  
Thomas E. Rogers, III  
United State Magistrate Judge

**Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation**

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Court Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. In the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must "only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation." *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2005).

Specific written objections must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three (3) days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a) & (e). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk  
United States District Court  
P. O. Box 2317  
Florence, South Carolina 29503

**Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation.** 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985).